



PRESS RELEASE
*Office of the United States Attorney
Middle District of Florida*

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For Immediate Release

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TAMPA MAN CONVICTED OF FIREBOMBING PLOT IN BRADENTON

Tampa, Florida - United States Attorney Paul I. Perez and Ralph C. Ostrowski, Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives today announced the conviction of Pele LaCruz Watkins, a 29 year old resident of Tampa, for a firebombing plot which he attempted to engineer in Bradenton, Florida. Watkins was convicted of being a convicted felon in possession of a firearm and ammunition; and solicitation to commit a crime of violence; specifically, arson of an occupied building. Watkins faces a maximum penalty of 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of \$175,000. Watkins is scheduled to be sentenced before Judge Susan C. Bucklew on September 28, 2005 at 8:30 a.m.

According to the evidence presented at trial, Watkins solicited another person to firebomb a competitor's lingerie modeling agency in Bradenton, known as "Cupids," located at 1417 Cortez Road. "Cupids" is open seven days a week; 24 hours a day and generally employs 12 women who model lingerie for customers. The evidence at trial showed that the firebombing would have jeopardized the lives of more than 20 persons,

since it was to occur on a Friday evening, the busiest day of the week for the business.

The evidence at trial also showed that Watkins met with an undercover agent working for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives on at least two occasions during October 2004. Watkins solicited the agent's assistance in firebombing a competitor's lingerie modeling agency. The undercover agent posed as a contract killer from New York City and was supposed to plant at least two explosive devices with timers at the target location. Watkins also provided the undercover agent with a loaded .9 mm semi-automatic pistol as a down payment for the firebombing, promising to pay him a total of \$3,000.00.

The case was investigated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives with the assistance of the Tampa Police Department. Assistant United States Attorney Michael E. Runyon prosecuted the case.